The Cartography of One

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The Cartography of One

by GoldenUsagi

Summary

In the verse of When the Devil Smiles Back. After Hannibal escapes custody in Memphis, he and Will reunite along a deserted highway after nearly a year apart.

Will lowered the window, letting the night breeze in as Hannibal walked up to the car. He leaned over to catch Hannibal's gaze with a smirk. "You need a ride, mister?"

Hannibal placed one hand on the roof of the car as he bent down. "A dangerous pastime in this day and age, picking up hitchhikers. I could be a psychopath."

Will gave him a sharp grin as he unlocked the door. "I'm counting on it."

Notes

This is not a timestamp, but takes place during When the Devil Smiles Back, between chapter 4 (after Will does his thing to Buffalo Bill) and chapter 5 (when Hannibal grabs Clarice for a midnight chat), and covers Will and Hannibal seeing each other for the first time since the bridge in Florence. WtDSB stands by itself as a story, but I always had an idea for Will and Hannibal's reunion, even though it didn't really fit into the structure of WtDSB. So here it is. :)

This fic has been translated into Russian here!

It was the dead of night, and the highway was deserted.

Somewhere along it, he would find Hannibal.

Will had shared two phone calls with Hannibal since his escape. Both had been quick exchanges of necessary information, and both had come from different phone numbers. When he had gotten the first call, Will had already been in Ohio himself, having realized what the random pattern of bodies meant. Hannibal had been in Memphis, five hundred miles away, and agreed he would make progress in Will's general direction and contact him again.

Having left Belvedere at sunset, Will was now driving down a two lane Illinois road that cut through a patch of undeveloped woodland. He slowed his speed when he approached the area Hannibal had named, and began to flash his lights periodically.

Will went almost another mile before a figure stepped out of the darkness of the tree line. Illuminated by the headlights, Hannibal held up a hand to his eyes. He was wearing a stolen uniform with dark pants and a slightly lighter shirt. Will came to a stop near him, and Hannibal moved toward the car.

Will lowered the passenger window, letting the night breeze in. He leaned over to catch Hannibal's gaze with a smirk. "You need a ride, mister?"

Hannibal placed one hand on the roof of the car as he bent down. "A dangerous pastime in this day and age, picking up hitchhikers. I could be a psychopath."

Will gave him a sharp grin as he unlocked the door. "I'm counting on it."

Hannibal smiled in turn, getting into the car and closing the door with almost a flourish.

Then he was leaning to meet Will halfway, bringing his hand to the back of Will's head as they shared a kiss that was brief but vital. Afterward, Will pressed his forehead to Hannibal's, remaining in place as they savored each other's presence.

There was no embellished reimagining of it in his memory palace. Will wanted to record the moment exactly as it was, and he knew Hannibal would do the same.

"Every day I envisioned this moment, Will," Hannibal said, "not knowing when it would occur, only that someday it would."

"Our streams share the same banks. Their courses won't be so easily diverted."

Hannibal's lips turned up at the words. "Water erodes all obstacles with time."

After another moment, Will broke their connection and pulled back. Hannibal did likewise, settling in his own seat, though his attention remained on Will.

Will rolled up the window, looking out at their surroundings. They were still the only car on the road, but that could change in an instant. "We need to be going."

“But of course.”

Will put the car into gear and started to drive. He continued to let Hannibal’s presence wash over him. It had been nine months since they had seen each other, but the rhythm of their relationship picked up like it had never been interrupted.

Will knew Hannibal’s eyes were on him, and even in the dim light of the car’s interior, he could see Hannibal gazing at him when he looked over.

Hannibal said, “‘You had me out of your life and would do anything to keep me from getting back in.’ Did I understand the second part of your message to Agent Starling correctly?”

“You did. I was going to give you a year to get out on your own.” Will gave Hannibal an amused glance. “Evidently my timeframe was on the mark.”

There was a soft huff of laughter from Hannibal. “Buffalo Bill was unexpected and most fortuitous. Without such an opening, I may well have remained under Frederick’s tender care for longer than you anticipated. What would you have done, if I may ask?”

“Created such a spectacle that Jack would have no choice but to consult you,” Will said, his eyes on the highway. “Written a language only you could read, and fashioned crime scenes you would finally insist you had to see in person. The hospital itself was the obstacle. Remove it, and the rest of the pieces fall like cards.”

“I cannot disagree, given its appalling record of losing prize patients during transport.”

Will chuckled.

“I hope you were not displeased by my sending Clarice Starling to you,” Hannibal continued. “Had I known at the time the opportunity that Catherine Martin presented, I would not have needlessly alerted anyone to your presence. However, I was confident that she would go alone, and that even if she did not, you would not have shown yourself were there a police presence.”

“My obscurity was by coincidence, not design. Someone was going to know I survived eventually.”

“True enough, I suppose. All things considered, circumstances concluded most favorably.” Hannibal shifted in his seat as he moved to adjust the air vents, meticulously positioning the ones on his side to his liking. Sitting back, he asked, “How many of Buffalo Bill’s crime scenes did you visit?”

“That was the third. Though clearly the most informative,” Will said, amusement in his voice. “You gift wrapped Gumb for me, in the packaging of Agent Starling.”

“I knew you would want him—that he would call to you as strongly as anyone since the Red Dragon. In time, you will have to tell me who else you have taken since we parted.”

“Less than you might imagine,” Will said dryly. “Though I wasn’t without pursuits.” Then, “I did want Buffalo Bill. But I was not the one who killed him.”

“But you had it done,” Hannibal said, his voice warm with pride as it flowed between them. “That you chose not to act with your own hands matters not. Unless you found yourself dissatisfied with the outcome?”

“Not at all. I made him a monument.” Will’s hands tightened on the wheel as he remembered what he had done with them only hours ago. “What happened before that was a conscious choice born out of curiosity.”

“Mine or yours?”

“Both,” Will said. “If I had wanted him that badly, your curiosity would not have overruled my own satisfaction.”

“Then everything has turned out for the best,” Hannibal said, pleased. “By the way, do you have my case with you?”

Will nodded, knowing Hannibal referred to the small bag that contained various drugs. “It’s in my suitcase.”

“Excellent. I would like to pay Clarice a visit.”

“I didn’t find her objectionable,” Will commented.

“Nor did I.”

There was a measured pause. “If you want to kill an FBI agent, find another one,” Will said. “I’ve already participated in the potential of her death as much as I intend to.”

“You mistake me,” Hannibal said, apparently not opposed to Will’s position. “I have no designs to kill her. Clarice was an interesting diversion, and she did us an inadvertent service. I merely wish to have a conversation with her.”

“Then why do we need the drugs?”

“I don’t think the good agent will be inclined to sit down with me otherwise, do you?”

Will nodded in acknowledgment, a smirk on his lips. He glanced at Hannibal before looking back at the road and the night that spread before them. “When does this conversation need to take place? Quantico is going to be on alert for the foreseeable future.”

“Clarice will still be in Belvedere. We can conclude matters before we go.”

“You escaped from prison less than twenty-four hours ago. Belvedere is swarming with FBI.”

“And it is quite the last place anyone will expect me to be,” Hannibal said, a smile in his voice.

Will shook his head, going through the motions of exasperation, even if he couldn’t quite summon it. “Fine. But we’re not staying *in* Belvedere.”

“As you like.”

“We can be there by morning, have a conversation tomorrow night. Then we’ll leave. I have a boat in North Carolina.”

“Departing the country would be best, I agree. There are many more pleasant places in the world to be. Though am I correct in assuming that you returned here shortly after my own transportation?”

“I returned to the country, but I hardly stayed nearby.”

Hannibal tilted his head. “Why not remain overseas for as long as it suited you?”

“I know how to disappear here,” Will said. “And I gravitate towards simplicity when left to my own devices.”

“This car, for example,” Hannibal said, his tone a mixture of teasing and distaste.

Will snorted. “It runs and it’s non-descript. Suitable for my purposes. My tastes are not as elaborate as yours.”

There was a pause, before Hannibal said, “Will, if you’re dissatisfied with the elegance of any of our accommodations—”

“I’m not,” Will said, finding it necessary to interrupt. “It’s simply that I don’t require it. That doesn’t mean I can’t appreciate it.”

“Good. I would be disheartened to only now learn that you were uncomfortable in our homes.”

Will stared out at the highway, blurs of trees flashing by as he drove. “It was a space we occupied side by side. Alone, I was… adrift there. I was a stranger walking my own hallways, a specter haunting once-favored rooms. So I found familiarity by other means.”

“You returned to places where isolation was routine, even welcome—where it was as natural as your own skin.”

“Yes.”

“Still. Everything that is mine is yours, Will. If we were separated more lastingly, I would hate to think you would enjoy none of it on your own.”

“I enjoyed,” Will said, one corner of his mouth turning up. “Short term accommodations become expensive for the long term, but I didn’t let that stop me. I ventured where I liked, including some very scenic cabins rented by the week—remote locations and excellent fishing.”

Hannibal chuckled. “At least you made use of the bank accounts.”

Will grinned at him in turn before focusing back on the road.

“On the subject of accommodations,” Will said, sobering, “we can’t go back to Florence. Our last two endings there were not fortunate. Hazarding a third seems unwise.”

“Reluctant as I am to concur, I must do so,” Hannibal said. “It was the city of my youth, but it seems those doors have closed, just as firmly as ones before them. But Florence exists in my memory palace, almost a separate thing unto itself. In yours, too—we may wander there together.”

There was a short silence, before Will said, “I’ve revisited the scene of our parting many times.”

“Have you?” Hannibal sounded surprised. “I have not. I preferred to return to happier occasions.”

“I don’t go there for the event itself, but rather for the impression it made. I didn’t see your design until it was in motion, didn’t predict your actions until they were a thing that had already occurred.”

“By that moment, my imprisonment was unavoidable, except by death, and our separation inevitable in any circumstance. It was possible that you had yet to be identified as my companion. Better that you remained so.”

“Do you still find your compassion for me inconvenient?”

“Not at all,” Hannibal said easily. “How do you find it?”

Will gathered his words. “Profound.”

He could feel Hannibal watching him closely in the darkened car, Hannibal’s gaze an almost tangible thing. “Is this a recent revelation?”

“No,” Will said. “But no single moment ever embodied it so irrevocably.”

“It was the decision of an instant.”

“Does that make it an untrue reflection?”

“No.” Hannibal’s voice was soft, confirming what Will had already known.

Will let the memory curl around him. “It’s an instant I’ll remember until the day I die.”

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